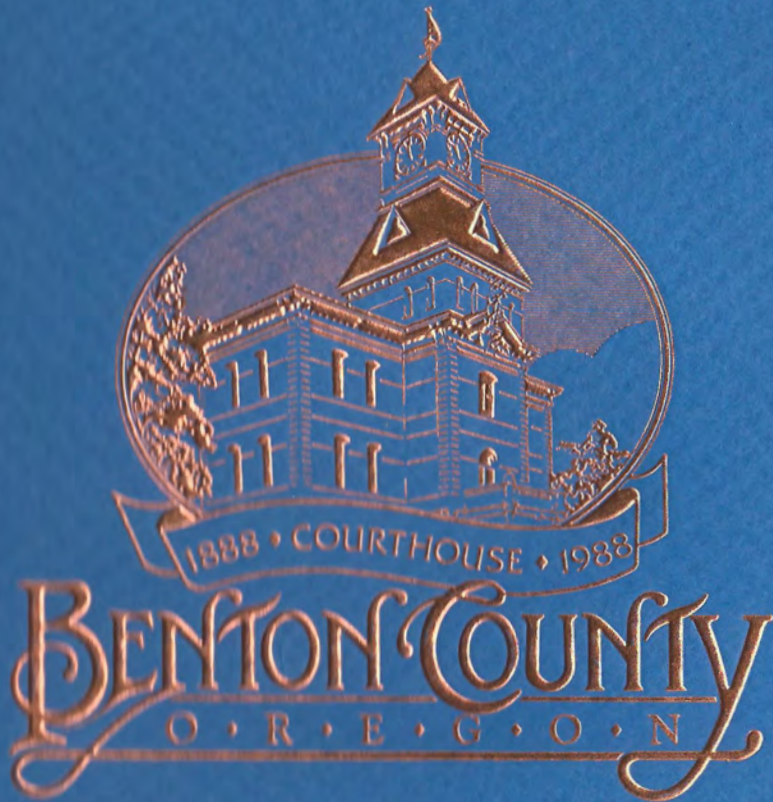
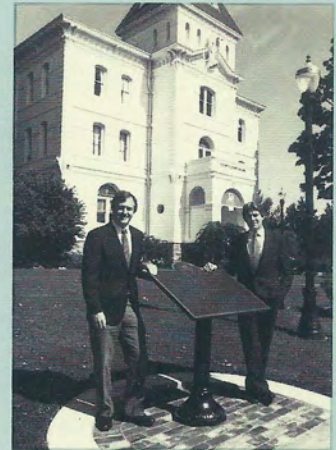


---

THE FLIGHT OF TIME





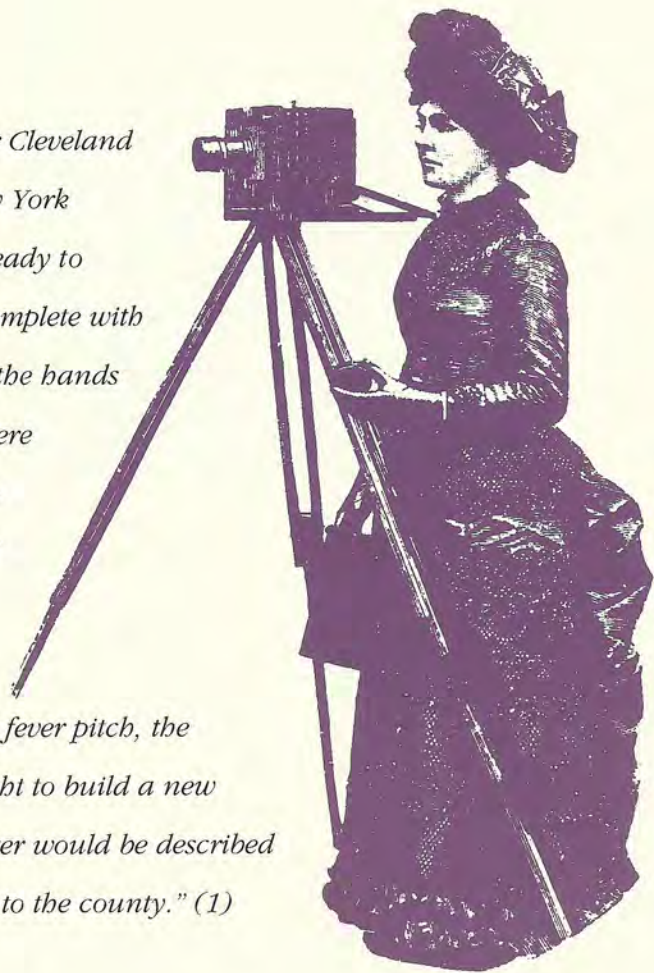
*Left: The historical plaque unveiled on July 4, 1988.  
Right: David Connell, President of the Benton County Bar Association (left) and Daniel G. Burk, Centennial Committee Chairman.*

## HISTORICAL PLAQUE

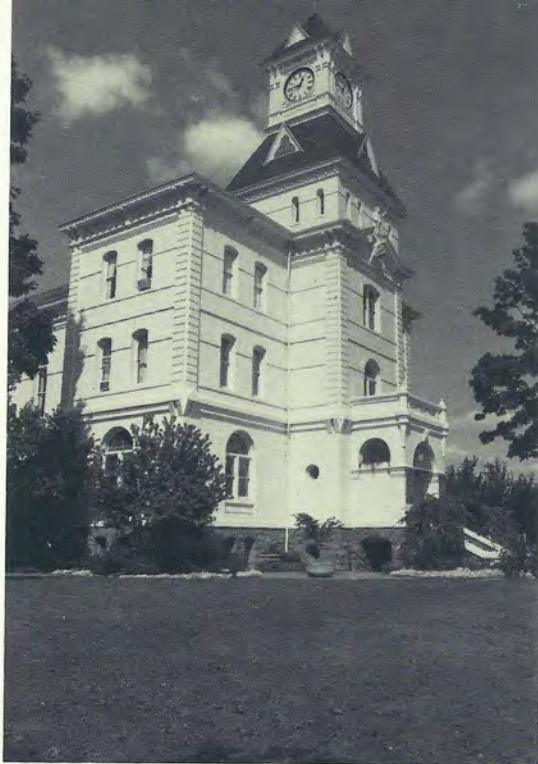
On the occasion of the Courthouse Centennial Celebration of July 1988, a historical plaque was unveiled. Cast in solid bronze by the Newman Brothers Corporation of Cincinnati, Ohio, the plaque was made possible, in part, by a donation from the Benton County Bar Association. The base for the plaque rests on refinished bricks set in a pattern which repeats the arch motif used throughout the courthouse. These bricks are also of historical significance for they were used in construction of the County's first courthouse, built in 1854.



*The year was 1887. Grover Cleveland was President of the United States. A New York inventor, George Eastman, was getting ready to introduce the first simple box camera, complete with film, which would put photography into the hands of ordinary people. Fashionable ladies were wearing bustles once again. And Benton County, Oregon was enjoying a boom of progress and prosperity. With 8,000 citizens, a rapidly growing county seat —Corvallis— and civic enthusiasm at a fever pitch, the county's leaders decided the time was right to build a new courthouse: an impressive edifice that later would be described as "an ornament to the city and a credit to the county." (1)*



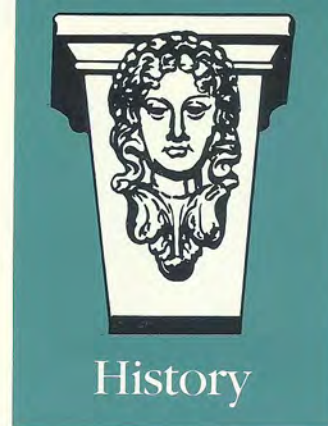
*That same courthouse stands today, the oldest one in Oregon still serving its original purpose. Here, justice is dispensed, county business is conducted and vital records are filed just as they have been for the past century. Thanks to sensitive renovation in the late 1970's, the modern-day courthouse looks much as it must have when its doors first opened in 1889. The Benton County Courthouse is a living record of architecture and history: a tribute to those who conceived and built it, and to those who have preserved its beauty through the decades. Most of all, it is a tribute to the people of Benton County, then and now, who have made the courthouse the area's most recognized symbol.*



**S**troll the arbor-like grounds of the Benton County Courthouse and you see a gleaming white building topped by a graceful, 110-foot clock tower that is still one of the most prominent features of the Corvallis Skyline.

Designed by Portland architect Delos D. Neer, the courthouse was built in 1888-89. Its style is consistent with the Italianate architecture popular at the time, and the building has been described as resembling “an Italian villa with a military influence.” (2)

This imposing structure replaced a smaller, two-story wooden courthouse — complete with metal cupola — in the Greek Revival style, built in 1854 just north of where the present courthouse stands. The land the courthouse occupies was donated to the county by Joseph



*Above: Joseph and Martha Avery  
Left: William Dixon*





## DELOS D. NEER

**Born in 1847 in Charlottesville, N.Y., Delos D. Neer, served in the Union Infantry and fought in the Shenandoah Valley campaign of 1864-65. After the Civil War he apprenticed as a builder and eventually became a journeyman carpenter. He moved west in 1875, settling first in San Francisco and, four years later, in Portland, where he established his architectural practice.**

**Neer's early designs were mainly for houses, schools and businesses in East Portland. He designed his first courthouse, for Clackamas County in Oregon City, in 1884. Three years later, Benton County chose his design for its new courthouse.**

and Martha Avery and William and Julia Ann Dixon, co-founders of the town first known as Marysville and later named Corvallis. (3)

By the late 1880's, Benton County and its county seat, Corvallis, were prospering. The city's first public waterworks was under construction. Plans were afoot to wire the central area for electricity. New buildings were rising all over town, including several that still stand today: the L.G. Kline Building at Second and Madison, the Hotel Corvallis and what is now Benton Hall on the Oregon State University campus. (4) The ill-fated Oregon Pacific

*Below: Benton Hall, built in 1887, and now the oldest building on the Oregon State University campus, was given the county namesake in recognition of the donations given by the people of Benton County for its construction. (Photo : OSU Archives, P16:643)*





*Left: An early lithograph of Benton County's old courthouse. (From D.D. Fagan's "History of Benton County," 1885)*

Railroad, (which would fail in the following decade with devastating economic results), was still generating enthusiasm and investment. As the Corvallis Gazette was to note early in 1889, "Nearly 60,000 people settled in Oregon

in 1888, and every section of the state has benefited thereby ... Surely there is a brilliant, exciting future for Oregon." (5)

Benton County's old courthouse, according to reports of the time, was in reasonably good shape. But it was small and somewhat crowded (6),

*Right: The Independence Day festivities on July 4, 1888 brought over 6,000 people to Corvallis to see the new Courthouse.*

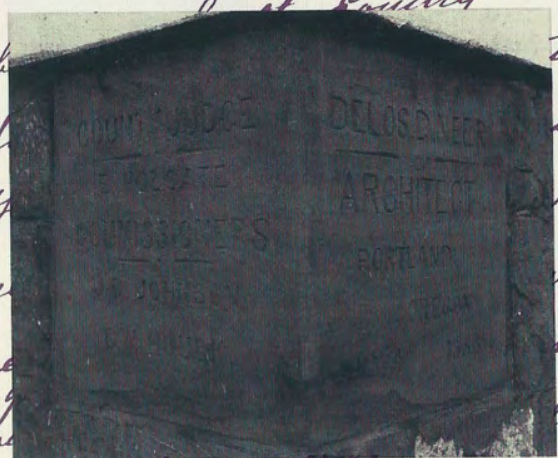


**Neer went on to design imposing courthouses for Lane, Polk and Baker counties in Oregon, and for Washington's Snohomish County; he also remodeled Washington County's Courthouse. Of these, only the Benton, Polk and Baker courthouses still stand. All three are still serving their original purpose.**

**Neer died Nov. 17, 1919, at age 71 at his home in Portland's Sellwood neighborhood. (32)**



to be returned to the building  
is for the Architect's  
incompetency or willful  
neglect of said Architect in  
his duties.



the performance of

In Witness whereof see the parties  
to this instrument have hereunto set over  
hands and seals the day and year above  
written.

Witness  
H. L. Porter

E. Holgate, Judge  
G. W. Hovey, Clerk  
J. D. Johnson  
Delos D. New



and civic leaders apparently felt it was not a suitable center of government for their fast-growing community. In 1886, voters approved a two-mill tax levy to erect a new courthouse. (7) Contracts were awarded in February of 1888 (8), and the cornerstone was laid that July 4, during Independence Day festivities that drew more than 6,000 people to Corvallis. (9)

The cornerstone, quarried near The Dalles, can be seen at the building's northeast corner. It is engraved with the names of Judge Erastus Holgate, Joseph D. Johnson and George W. Houck, the County Court members who launched the construction project. Holgate was a prominent Corvallis attorney; Houck, a farmer with large holdings in the Monroe area and a homestead south of Corvallis. Johnson's son, William T. Johnson, later became a prominent local physician, churchman and Legislator. (10)

*Left: Original contract between architect Delos D. Neer and Judge Erastus Holgate, Joseph D. Johnson, and George W. Houck.  
Inset: Original cornerstone, laid July 4, 1888.*

## July 4, 1888

**“The band furnished splendid music during the day and made a fine appearance.....The usual ceremonies were here carried out and then the hour of dinner arrived. A grand rush was made for the different hotels and eating houses, but a large number were compelled to go without their meals. Some of the grocerymen turned their stores into eating houses by turning boxes upside down and supplying oysters and crackers to the hungry throng. Dinner being over, next on the programme was the laying the cornerstone of the new courthouse at one o'clock. An able address was made by Col. John Kelsey, when the stone was placed in position and a number of things placed in.”**

Corvallis Gazette, July 6, 1888



**A parade, dedication ceremonies, fire hose races, and a “sham battle” were all part of the festivities surrounding the new courthouse on July 4, 1888.**

The building was essentially completed by July of 1889, when the county moved its offices into the new courthouse and the Corvallis City Council convened in a room it had leased for \$75 a year in the northeast corner of the first floor (now the District Court jury room). (11) That same week, an Englishman, Jo Jo Huffman, razed the older courthouse and salvaged its lumber, which he reportedly used to build houses near what is now 12th Street and Polk Avenue. (12)

The Circuit Court, with Judge R.S. Bean presiding, sat in its first session in the new courthouse on November 4, 1889. (13)

The project, driven by a spirit of civic pride and bold dreams for the future, was not without its controversies. The total cost, including furnishings, was less than \$70,000. But some felt that was too much. In March of 1888, the county's Republican Central Committee went on record with a resolution stating "that we think



\$50,000 is enough to build a courthouse and jail in Corvallis." (14) Disputes over the project's cost seem to have taken a political toll, too. By the time the courthouse opened, two of the three County Court members who approved the project (Houck and Johnson) had been voted out of office.

*Right: Scottish-born stonemason, Thomas Mann, won the contract for building the foundation, doing the brickwork and finishing the courthouse's exterior — at \$34,628, nearly half of the project's cost. Below: Mann stands in the foreground with his crew as the foundation of the new courthouse takes shape. At the far left are the columns of the original courthouse, the only photograph known to exist of the original structure.*



## THOMAS MANN

Thomas Mann immigrated to the U.S. in 1854, settling finally in Portland where he established himself as a reputable mason. He did the brick work for the Oregon State Capitol in Salem (destroyed by fire in 1934).

Mann suffered from a chronic throat condition. When doctors were unable to cure him, Mann took up the study of medicine, ultimately becoming a physician. He never practiced, however — and, according to his daughter, never cured himself of his throat ailment.

Whatever his record as a doctor, Mann's masonry skills cannot be faulted: In nearly a century, no serious crack has ever developed in the concrete he used to finish the courthouse's outside walls.

Thomas Mann's daughter lives today in Yachats, Oregon. She is the only known "first generation" survivor of the men employed to build the Benton County Courthouse.



## POVEY BROTHERS

The beautiful stained-glass treatments throughout the courthouse were the work of Povey Bros. of Portland, Or. The work of this family-run business, established the same year the courthouse was built (1888), is considered to be among the highest quality of the period. The Povey Brothers were the last of several generations of English ancestors in the glasswork business. Trained by their father, Joseph, who immigrated to American in 1848, the Poveys used American glass, including opalescent, as well as large quantities of glass from Italy and Germany in their creations.

Even so, the completed courthouse was a source of community pride. Soon after it opened, the editor of the Gazette wrote: "...it is an elegant piece of workmanship. From the front to the back entrance, everything has a rich looking color and shows that the work has been done with care and precision ... (it is) the finest structure for a courthouse in Oregon ..." (15)

*Owners and artisans of the famous Povey Bros. stained-glass company posed for company photograph in the early part of this century.*







**Benton County's first telephone franchise was established in 1880 and operated out of the Ray Grocery Store, located at 2nd and Monroe Streets in Corvallis. The following year, Philomath had its first phone line when a telephone was installed in the Henkle Store in that town. The citizens of Benton County took so quickly to this new invention that a 1912 brochure touting the virtues of settling in the mid-Willamette Valley claimed "Corvallis has more phones per capita than any town its size in the U.S."**



The Courthouse is laid out in the shape of an H, measuring 73 by 116 feet at its extremities. Most of the material used in its construction was local: "superior quality gray granite" from quarries near what is now the Witham Hill neighborhood of west Corvallis; bricks from local brickyards, including one which operated on Crystal Lake Drive into the 1970's; native pine and fir from the area's abundant forests. (16)



## The Building



*Left: Union Depot in Corvallis, located at Ninth and Washington Streets. The Depot was moved in 1917 to Sixth Street between Madison and Monroe Streets where it remained until 1982. It was then purchased by private investors and moved to the Willamette River site just north of the Harrison Street Bridge. Today it serves as a restaurant.*





**The first riverboat service to Corvallis began in 1852, and by the 1880's plush paddle-wheelers were making the Corvallis-Portland run three times per week.**

Gazette Times-July 1, 1988



Fine sand for the interior plastering was ordered from the Lewis River in Washington Territories because, according to the Gazette of Feb. 22, 1889, "no sand suitable could be procured at any nearer point."

Getting the sand from Washington to Corvallis was no easy matter. First it was shipped by barge to Portland, where it was loaded onto river flatboats for the journey to Salem; from there, it went on smaller boats down the less navigable stretch of the Willamette River to Albany.

In Albany, the sand was reloaded yet again, this time to railroad cars, for the final leg of the trip to Corvallis. The entire trip cost just \$384. (17)

Missing from the profile of today's courthouse are the 18 chimneys which punctuated the original roofline. Although the building was equipped with a furnace and boiler, many of the offices were heated by woodstoves during the early years. The chimneys were removed shortly after World War I. (18)

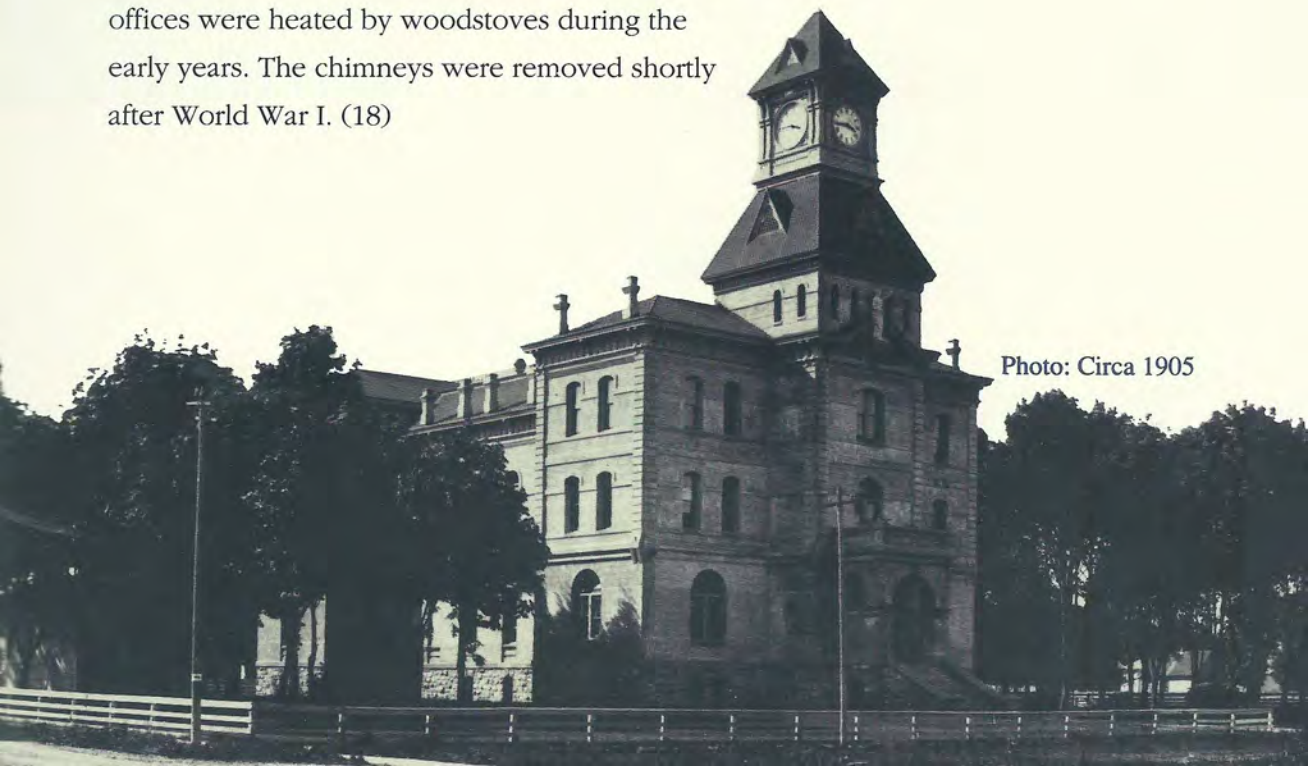


Photo: Circa 1905



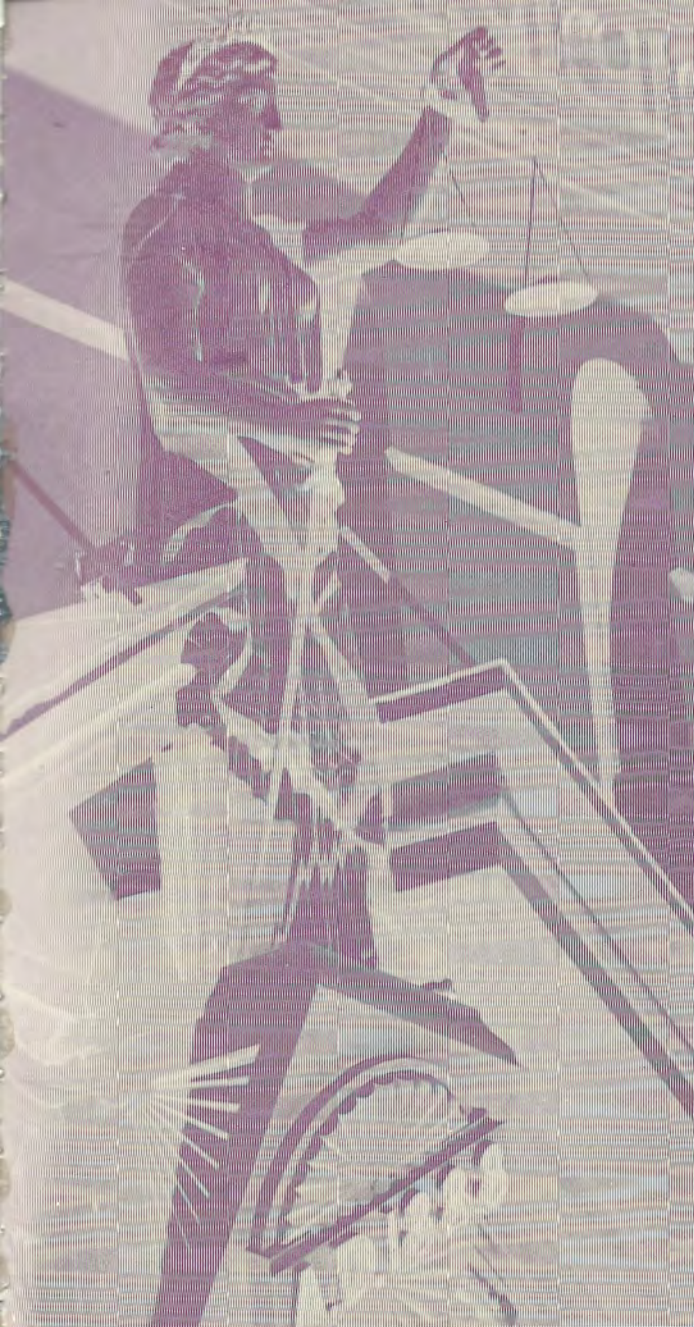


Other architectural features remain intact: The low-relief string courses and quoins which ornament the upper stories; the bracketed cornice that supports the classic, hipped roof; the prominent, tower-like pavilion and portico which form the eastern main entrance. The keystone which



supports the portico's arched entryway features a carved stone female head described in early accounts as a portrait of "Justice Asleep." (19)





## THEMIS

In Greek Mythology the “idea” of Themis represented more than a god-figure. She represented “the herd instinct, the collective conscience, the social sanction,....the social imperative.”

“The Greek word Themis and the English word Doom are one,...and the same: Doom is the thing set, fixed, settled, it begins in convention, the stress of public opinion: it ends in statutory judgment. It is the collective doom, public opinion, that...crystallizes into Law.”

“Themis was worshipped in the plural. Out of many dooms, many public opinions, many judgments, arose the figure of the one goddess. Out of many themistes came Themis. These themistes...stood to the Greek for all he held civilized.”

“In Homer Themis has two functions. She convenes and dissolves the assembly; she presides over the feast.”

“We think of Themis as an abstraction, as Law, Justice, (and) Right.”

Jane Ellen Harrison  
“Epilogomena and Themis:  
A Study of the Origins of Greek Religion”.  
University Press, New Hyde Park, N.Y. 1962





*Pictured above in front of their make-shift home is Odina Gravel, his wife and son. Gravel was a skilled carpenter who worked on the courthouse "clock tower".*

**Somewhere between 25 and 40 men, skilled in trades of masonry and carpentry, were working on the courthouse at any given time. Large public projects such as the Benton County Courthouse required an almost "nomadic existence" of these artisans and tradesmen and their families. All, along with their belongings, had to be moved from town to town and building site to building site as projects became available.**

Standing guard over the east entrance is a graceful statue of Themis, the Greek Goddess of Justice. About eight feet tall, she was manufactured by the W.H. Mullins Co. of Salem, Ohio, a leading maker of stamped-metal statuary popular in the late 19th century. The statue is believed to be the last remaining example of courthouse statuary in the Willamette Valley.

Such statues generally were depicted with blindfolds. According to a 1957 newspaper account, that fact was pointed out to an early Corvallis judge. His reported response: "It's high time that Justice saw what she is doing." (20)

Crowning the courthouse is a tower bearing the four-faced Town Clock, at \$1,225 the single most costly item in the building's construction. (21) Made by the Howard Clock Co. of Wildham, Mass., it bears the legend "The Flight of Time" above its four faces. The clock's hands are still

operated by the original clock mechanism, although the old weight-and-pulley drive (which had to be reset weekly) was replaced in 1953 by an electric motor which is still being used to keep the clock running.



*Above: The clock tower of the courthouse has become the most recognized site in the Corvallis skyline. Left: The original clock mechanism, purchased in 1888, still operates today.*



➤ *"Favorite among passers by....  
the sweet smell of the  
rosebushes that line the  
main entrance..."*



## FLOYD BILLINGS

Floyd Billings, one of the most colorful personalities to have worked in the Courthouse, served as Circuit Court Baliff from 1965 to 1977. Floyd was known for his fastidious nature, dapper dress and flamboyant oath giving to witnesses. When the roses of the courthouse rose garden were blooming a fresh one could always be found on his lapel. Because of damage to the plants from improper cuttings, the practice of taking flowers from the courthouse gardens is no longer permitted.

The courthouse is the centerpiece of a landscaped park shaded by several large, graceful big-leaf maples, planted in the 1850's. Several of those



trees have been removed since 1979 because of disease and rot, but county grounds-keepers have planted red leaf maples in their place. In reflection of the courthouse's rich history, the Benton County Parks Department gardeners have begun to create a floral garden on the grounds containing flower varieties that were grown in Oregon gardens a century ago. Their care and attention to detail have made the courthouse grounds a showcase of living, historical beauty.



## COURTHOUSE STAFF 1913

**FIRST ROW:** From left: W. H. Rickard, Assessor; S.N. Warfield, Recorder; W.A. Gellatly, Sheriff; W.H. Malone, County Judge; Emory J. Newton, County Clerk; W.A. Buchanan, County Treasurer; Roy Cannon, School Superintendent; Judge McFadden.

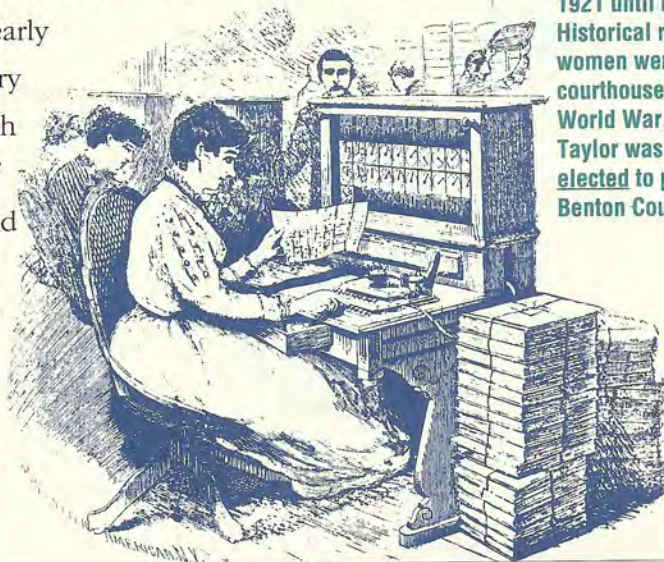
**SECOND ROW:** From left: Harry Auld, Abstractor; Arthur Clarke, District Attorney; Gertrude McHenry, Stenographer for Title Co.; Mrs. Mary Stoddard, Records Office; Dr. J.R.N. Bell, Minister; Mrs. Cannon; Mrs. Grace Lowell; Fred McHenry, Deputy Clerk; William A. Lane, Janitor.

**THIRD ROW:** From left: Joe Wilson, Lawyer; Mr. King, Treasurers Office; Parker Bearsley, Abstract Office; Mr. Wilkes, Engineer.





Like most public buildings, the Benton County Courthouse has been remodeled over the years to meet evolving county needs. The earliest remodeling probably came within a decade of the building's construction, when the original acetylene gas lighting fixtures were replaced by electricity. Other piecemeal remodeling over the decades reflected changing times and technologies: An electric call bell-system was added in 1900, for instance, and in 1914 the County bowed to the presence of women by adding a restroom for them. Sawdust on the courtroom floors was removed in the early part of the century and replaced with spittoons, first of papier mache and later of brass, which remained until the mid-1950's. (22)



## Remodeling & Restoration

### SUSAN BEESON TAYLOR

Susan Beeson Taylor served as Benton County Treasurer from 1921 until her death in 1948. Historical research indicates women were employed at the courthouse prior to the first World War, however, Mrs. Taylor was the first woman elected to public office in Benton County.



*Top: Victor Moses (in the foreground) as County Clerk. Much of the furnishings in this photo have been preserved and are in the Courthouse's new historical display: "The Centennial Room"*  
*Bottom: Victor Moses, seated in foreground, in his later years as County Baliff.*

Perhaps the most noticeable change — and the one which gave the courthouse the gleaming beauty it has today — came in the mid-1920's. That was when then-County Judge Victor Moses (for decades a prominent figure in county politics and civic affairs) ordered the grey concrete exterior walls painted "whiter than snow."

In 1954-55, the county launched a major remodeling aimed at making the courthouse more efficient and functional. Much of that project involved removing or covering "old-fashioned" architectural details and furnishings and replacing them with "modern" materials — plywood, veneer panels, acoustic ceiling tiles. The original Circuit Courtroom was divided in two to make room for a new District Court. And several offices were partitioned to provide space for the growing county work force.

Although the Courthouse was designated an Oregon Historic Site in 1968, it was not until the



1970's that serious efforts were made to return the building to its original appearance. Urged on by local historians, the County Commission in 1976 agreed that a badly needed functional renovation should pay special attention to preserving and, where possible, recreating the building's historical features.

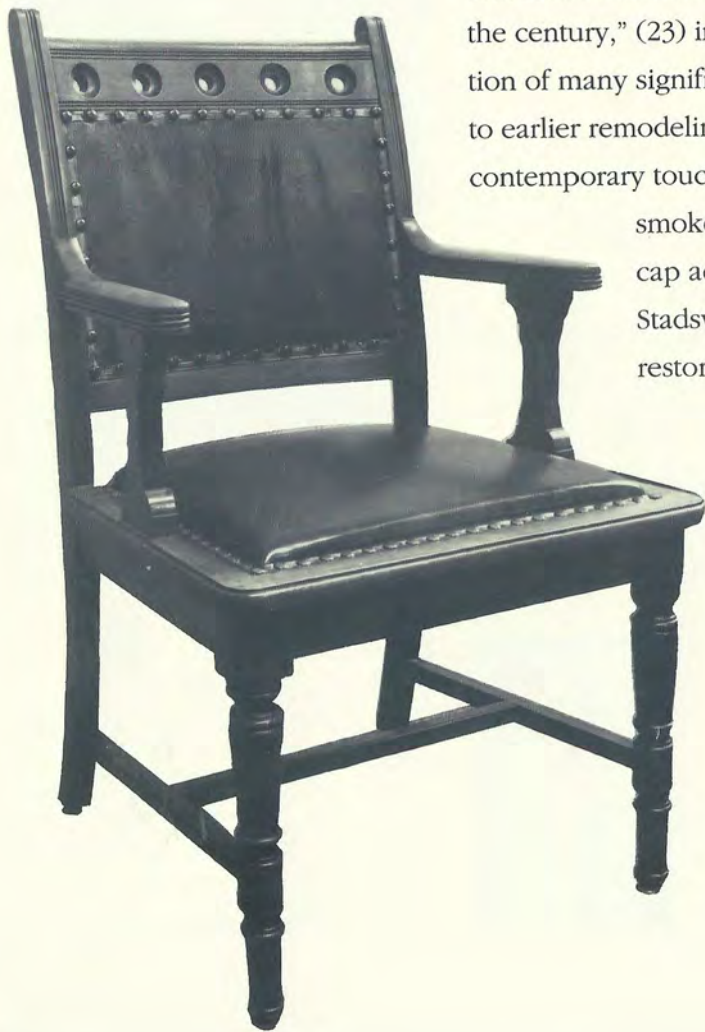
The county hired Corvallis architect Cy Stadsvold, AIA, to research and design the remodeling. (Stadsvold's study also helped win the courthouse a 1977 nomination to the National Register of Historic Places). The project was completed by 1979 at a cost of approximately \$869,000. Additional work to restore the Circuit Judge's chambers and jury room was done later with the help of donated funds.



## VICTOR MOSES

**Victor Moses, who along with his wife Vina, was known for his philanthropic spirit, spent most his career in public service. Moses served county government first as Deputy Clerk and then County Clerk from the turn of the century until 1914 when he became the Corvallis Postmaster. He served in that capacity for over 18 years under the Wilson, Harding and Franklin Roosevelt administrations. When not serving as Postmaster Victor Moses got elected as County Judge and ended his long career serving as Bailiff for the Circuit Court.**

*Left: Cy Stadsvold, AIA, Corvallis architect did the research and design work during the 1970's remodeling of the courthouse.*



The result has been described as “a building that looks much as it might have at the turn of the century,” (23) including the faithful re-creation of many significant details that had been lost to earlier remodelings. At the same time, such contemporary touches as new electrical wiring, a

smoke-detection system and handicap access ramps were added. Cy Stadsvold’s work in preserving and restoring the Benton County Courthouse won for him the coveted American Institute of Architect’s “Significant Building Award” in September, 1979.

Today’s courthouse is a beautiful, historically rich building that still functions as an up-to-date center for justice and county government.



# Walking Tour

A

*As you begin your self-guided tour of this beautiful old edifice, take time to notice the many small architectural details, the period treatments and quality of workmanship throughout the building. It is these fine details that make the Benton County Courthouse such a special place. Let your mind wander back in time, to an earlier age of horse and buggy, to a little "college town" of fewer than 2000 souls, who, along with their rural neighbors, built a House of Justice considered by many to be an "extravagance" - - but which expressed more eloquently than words their belief in Justice and their hopes for the future.*

## The Basement

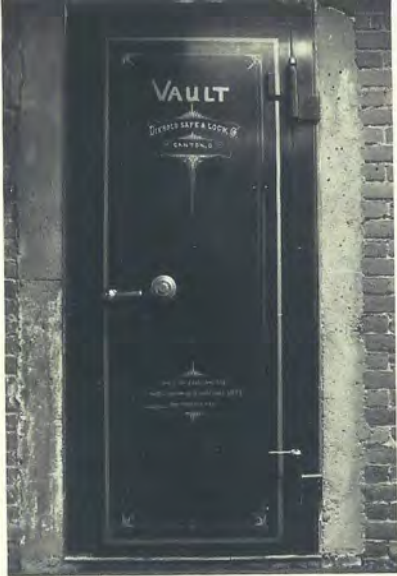
The courthouse's daylight basement originally was used for storage and to house the sawdust-fired furnace that provided central heating. Here one can see the "heavily rusticated" ashlar gray granite, 32 inches thick, that forms the building's foundation (24), as well as some of the more than 800,000 bricks used in its construction.

For a time, the basement was considered as a possible jail site. Construction plans initially called for a new jail to be built alongside the courthouse, to replace the rapidly deteriorating lockup that had stood south of the site since 1856. In April 1888, the County Court was ordered to explore the possibility of putting the cells in the courthouse base-



*Above: The old "Lockup" built in 1856.*





ment “so as to reduce the cost of the building as much as possible.” (25) The commissioners rejected that idea and awarded a contract to the Pauly Jail Building and Manufacturing Co. of St. Louis, Missouri. But a prominent local Democrat, John Burnett, accused the County Court of violating the law in awarding the contract. He sued, the contract was nullified and the jail project was cancelled.

The aged jail was still being used in 1922, when a Benton County grand jury again recommended putting jail cells in the courthouse basement. Again, the recommendation was rejected. Finally, in 1929 a new jail was built north of the courthouse. It served until its replacement in 1976 by the present Benton County Corrections Facility.

Today the basement houses the county’s records and elections offices. Its appear-



*Top: Vault at the west end of the basement. Bottom: The new jail, built in 1929, served until its replacement in 1976.*



ance is a fine example of the aesthetic and functional balances achieved by the 1979 remodeling. What once was an ugly, cramped cellar was transformed with innovative but relatively inexpensive touches: for instance, the gently arched cedar lath false ceiling not only hides utility pipes but echoes the graceful arch motif found elsewhere in the building.

## **BASEMENT HALLWAY**

**Among the many innovative and aesthetically pleasing aspects of the Cy Stadvold designed renovation/restoration project of the mid-1970's is the basement hallway (photo at left).**

**Stadvold first called for the removal of all coverings on the walls in order to show the exposed bricks and granite used in the foundation. He then cleverly hid all the pipes, ductwork and telephone and electrical wiring, normally so obvious in large public and private buildings, by painting them flat black and building an arched lattice work canopy that runs the length of the hallway.**

**Not only is it delightfully pleasing to the eye but repeats the arch motif used throughout the building by architect, Delos D. Neer.**





Above: The front entrance doorplate, a sample of the beautiful workmanship and intricate detail throughout the courthouse.

## First Floor

From the intricate, cast-metal door plates and knobs to the gracefully arched doorways and gleaming woodwork, the first floor reveals many of the details that have made the courthouse a showpiece of architecture and design since it first opened.

The foyer just inside the east (main) entrance looks much as it did a century ago, with one noteworthy exception.

Stand in the foyer, facing the entrance, and look up. You can clearly see that the graceful staircase to your right once was balanced by another on the left. That stairway was removed in 1960 to make way for an elevator shaft, which also encroaches on the arch leading into the hallway. The doorway to what is now the District Court jury room also had to be relocated at that time, breaking what once was a beautiful







symmetry of design —but also providing access to the upper floors for those who cannot climb stairs. (26)

The foyer's woodwork is original. When the Courthouse was built, historical accounts tell us, the pine and fir wainscoting was left in its natural colors. In 1926, the wood was tinted and varnished, probably resulting in higher-contrast colors (as can be seen today in the restored courtrooms). (27)

Also original is the intricately carved newel post at the foot of the stairs — or most of it. Sometime in the late 1960s or early '70's, the sphere that topped the post disappeared. In 1976, local history buff



## CENTENNIAL ROOM

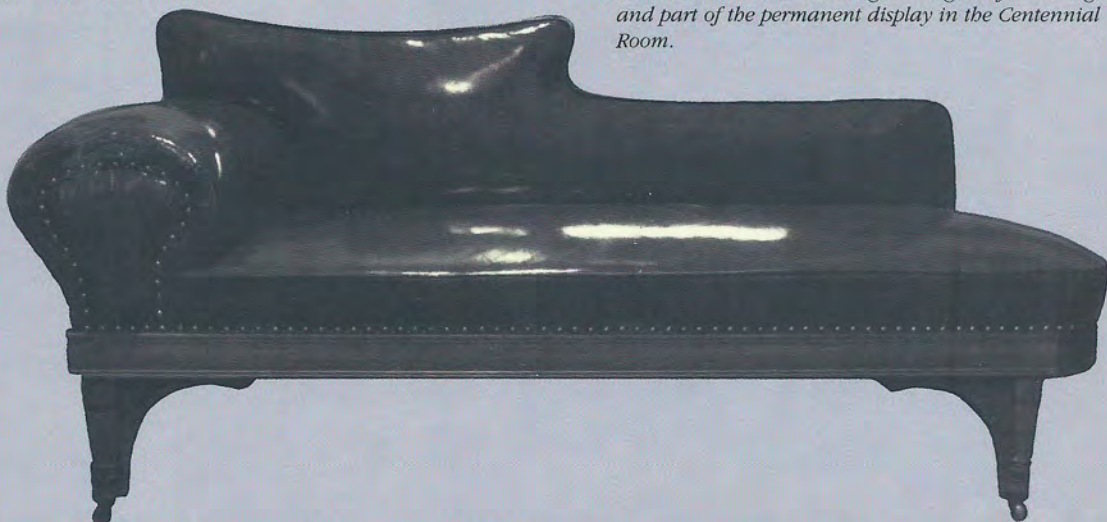
The "Centennial Room" was created in response to the public interest in seeing the documents, memorabilia and furniture associated with the history of the courthouse. Often in the past, these objects could not be shown due to a lack of security, their scattered location throughout the building or their fragile nature.

With a major gift from the Hewlett-Packard Corporation the room was completed in June 1988 in time for the Courthouse Centennial Celebration. All furniture in the room is "original", purchased upon completion of the building in 1889. The remodeled "Centennial Room" was designed by Oscar Hult and Daniel Burk. The cabinetry, shutterwork and "old time" office setting were the work of Andrew Keith, Alan Taylor and Gary Gibson respectively.

It is appropriate that this area should be termed the "Centennial Room" as it was the first room in the courthouse to be opened for public use. The Corvallis City Council rented it from the County in the Summer of 1889 to hold its public meetings.



*Above/top: Historic artifacts (courtesy of Benton County Historical Museum) which exemplify life in the 1880's are featured in the changing display cases. Above: The Centennial Room, on the first floor, also serves as the District Court Jury Room. Below: This couch is among the original furnishings and part of the permanent display in the Centennial Room.*







Maurice Bullard had a duplicate crafted from a solid block of maple he had been saving since the 1930's. (28)

Inside the District Court jury room, and in many other offices, you can see some of the original plate-glass windows, easily distinguished by their rippled appearance. Likewise, the stained-glass bands which adorn the window arches are original, as are several of the elegant wooden window shutters seen here

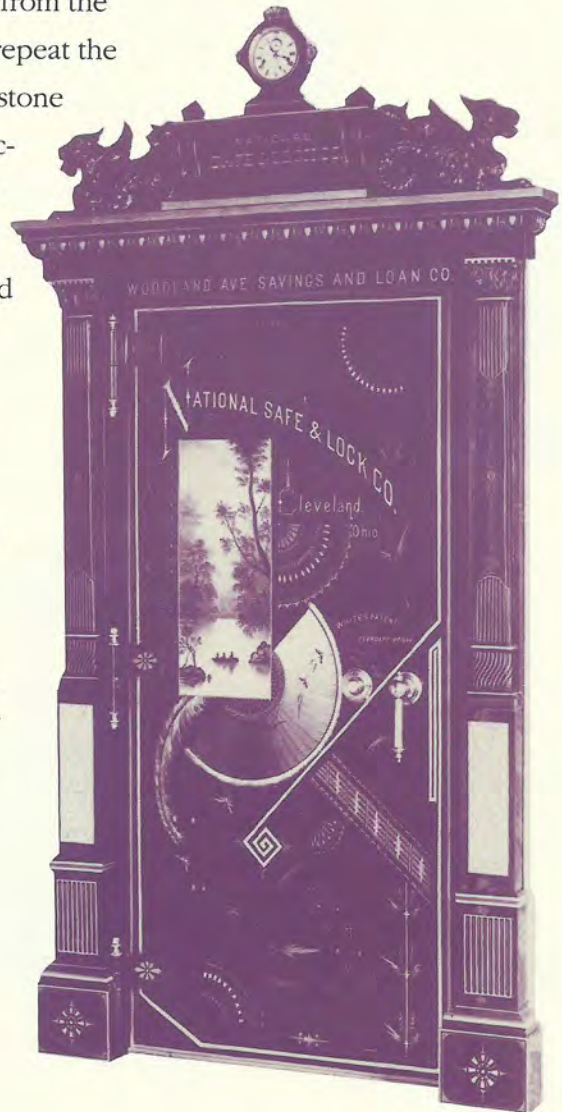


and throughout the building. The shutters were sold during the 1954 remodeling. Corvallis resident Jack Porter, who bought many of them, sold them back to the county in 1979. Missing shutters were replaced by faithful recreations.

A reprint from the 1880's catalog from which the courthouse vaults were ordered.

The long first-floor hallway, viewed from the foyer, is framed by graceful arches that repeat the entry motif, complete with sculpted keystone heads. The lighting fixtures are reproductions, selected to complement historical details. In the early years of electricity, fixtures were mere bare bulbs suspended from the ceilings by long cords.

Midway down the hall, where the District Court staff now works, is the original County Clerk's office with its huge, double-sided vault. This is one of three vaults built by the National Safe and Lock Co. of Cleveland, Ohio and, installed when the courthouse was built for the protection of vital records and courtroom evidence. (Additional vaults in the basement were added later). An early photograph shows that the clerk's vault once was topped by an ornate clock and a pair of cast-metal







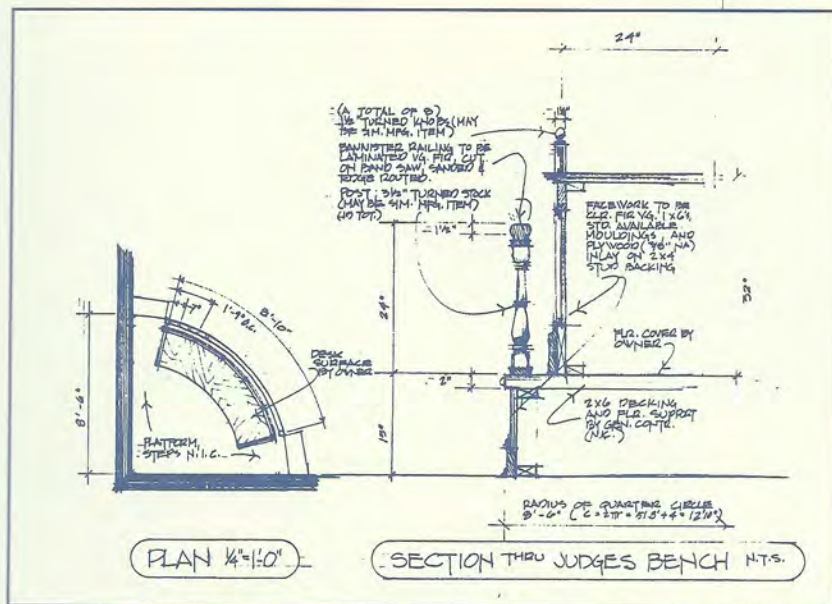
griffins (see photo on page 35). The clock has disappeared, but the figures were located in 1981 in the yard of a Corvallis resident, Agnes Flint Eckman, who had purchased them during the 1950's courthouse remodeling and had been using them as patio ornaments. She donated them to the Benton County Historical Museum for protection and preservation. (29)

At the end of the hall, on the building's northwest corner, is the present-day District Courtroom. Here the Benton County Court —

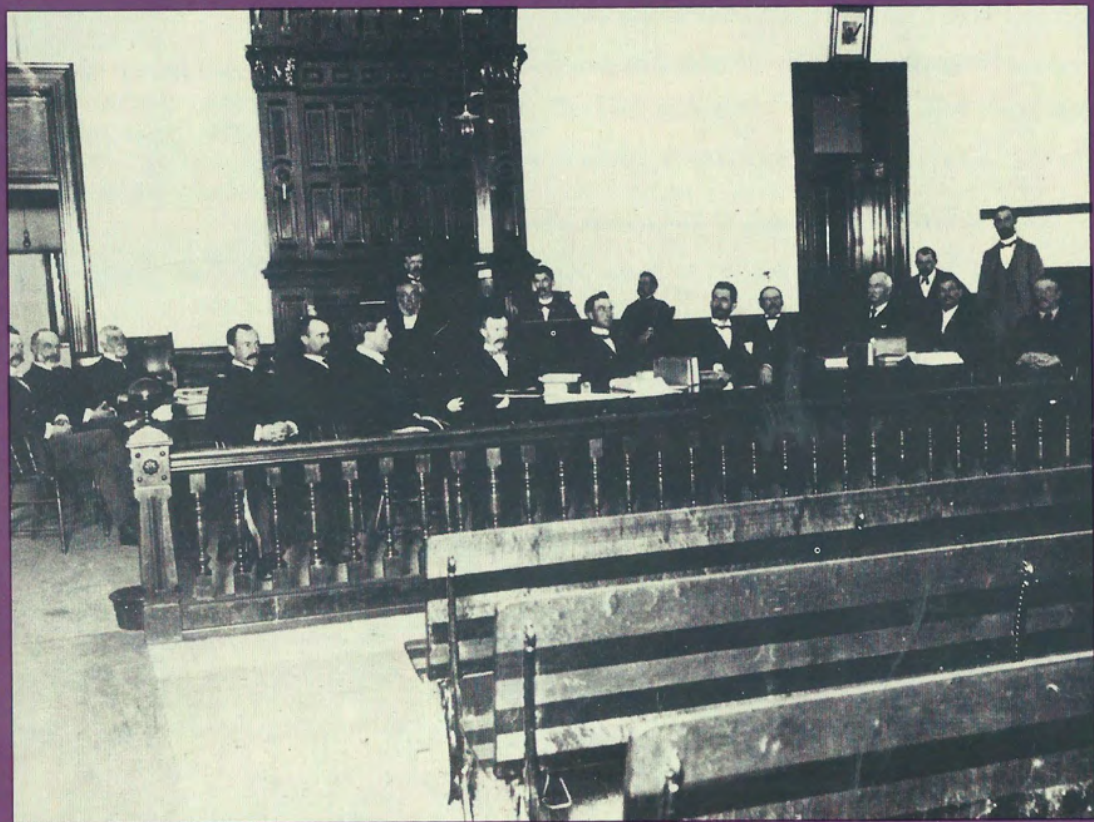


predecessor to today's County Commission — met to conduct county business and settle petty legal disputes. The room as it appears now is a faithful recreation of the original, down to the curved bench, railing and other woodwork copied from photographs of early County Court sessions.

**Architectural detail of District Courtroom woodworking excerpted from "Benton County Courthouse Study".** ( Courtesy Cy Stadvold, A.I.A., February 1977.)







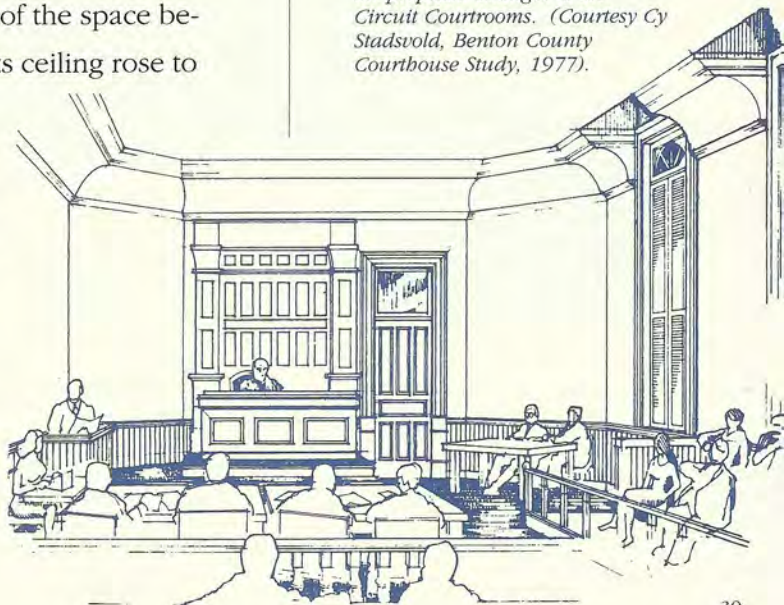
## Second Floor

For nearly a century, justice has been dispensed from courtrooms on the second floor of the Benton County Courthouse. Cases involving murder, theft, fraud, assault, even political intrigue have been heard here since the first court was gavelled into session on November 4, 1889.

As designed by Delos D. Neer, that courtroom was impressive indeed. It occupied nearly the entire second floor, including all of the space between the east and west wings. Its ceiling rose to 24 feet. Flanked by tall, arched windows, the courtroom was crowned with an ornate, wood-and-plaster ceiling medallion. A handsome, carved panel rose behind the judges' bench. A handsome, carved panel rose behind the judges' bench. A handsome, carved panel rose behind the judges' bench.



*Above: Detail of ceiling medallion that once graced the 24 foot ceiling above the second floor courtroom. Below: Drawing of the proposed changes to the Circuit Courtrooms. (Courtesy Cy Stads vold, Benton County Courthouse Study, 1977).*





*Right: Circuit Courtroom #1.  
Below: Woodworking detail of the  
courtroom furnishings and the  
original refinished spectator's  
benches.*



Remodeling in the 1950's stripped the room of its most impressive features. The ceiling was lowered to 16 feet and covered in acoustic tile. The room was split in two along its north-south axis to create a second courtroom for the new District Court. The wooden wainscotting was removed and the judges' bench was covered with veneer. The panel behind the bench was removed. Despite efforts to locate the panel, it has never been found. The result was a pair of utilitarian courtrooms which looked much like this floor's 1950's-style Courtroom 3, where Juvenile Court now meets.

The 1977 restoration attempted to restore the Circuit Courtrooms to some of their lost grandeur, while creating additional space for county offices.

The two courtrooms were reoriented along the building's east-west axis to separate public areas from the judges' private chambers. District Court was moved to the first floor, leaving two rooms for Circuit Court. The original judge's bench and clerk's desk, now in Circuit Courtroom No. 1, were stripped of their veneer coverings. New wainscot panels and railings were fashioned to match or complement older woodwork. The spectators' benches — part of the original courthouse furnishings — were refinished.

In adjoining Courtroom No. 2, new woodwork was designed to match the original as closely as possible.



*Left: The judge's private chambers*



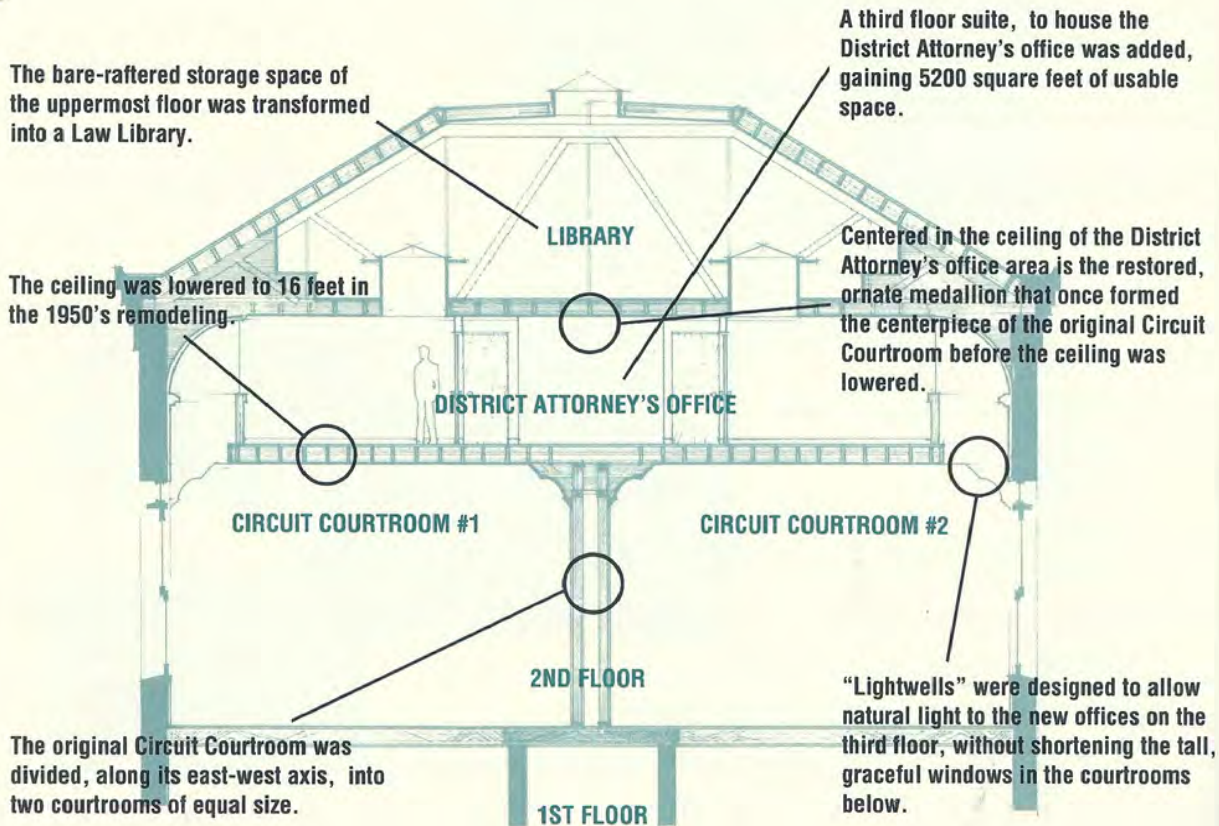
# 1979 RESTORATION

Cy Stadvold, A.I.A.

The bare-raftered storage space of the uppermost floor was transformed into a Law Library.

The ceiling was lowered to 16 feet in the 1950's remodeling.

The original Circuit Courtroom was divided, along its east-west axis, into two courtrooms of equal size.



A third floor suite, to house the District Attorney's office was added, gaining 5200 square feet of usable space.

Centered in the ceiling of the District Attorney's office area is the restored, ornate medallion that once formed the centerpiece of the original Circuit Courtroom before the ceiling was lowered.

"Lightwells" were designed to allow natural light to the new offices on the third floor, without shortening the tall, graceful windows in the courtrooms below.

In the fall of 1976 the Benton County Commissioners retained the office of Cy Stadvold to study the potential for interior renovation and restoration of the Benton County Courthouse.

In both rooms, Stadvold faced a dilemma. He wanted to create a usable space above the courtroom, but did not wish to truncate the graceful, tall windows along both exterior walls. His creative solution was to build “lightwells” that left each window intact while providing natural light to new offices on the third floor.

The county lacked the money to remodel the adjoining Circuit Court jury room. In 1980, Corvallis resident Leatha R. Porter made a major gift donation to the Courthouse Preservation Fund to restore and redecorate the room in memory of her father, Benton County pioneer, Peter Rickard, who had served as a County Commissioner and as Sheriff during the era when the courthouse was built and first used. His photograph hangs inside.



## **RICHARD MENGLER**

**The Honorable Richard Mengler, Senior Circuit Court Judge, served as District Court Judge from 1954-1959 and Circuit Court Judge from 1965-1982.**

**Judge Mengler is generally credited to be the individual most responsible for the restoration and preservation of the Courthouse in the mid-1970's.**



Mengler also gets credit for restoring the American flag to its place on the pole at the clock tower's peak. The flag had not flown since the 1920s, apparently because early county workers found it unnerving to climb out on the roof to raise and lower the flag. It was not until the remodeling of the late 1970s that the judge convinced the county to run the Stars and Stripes back up the pole. (30)

Judge Mengler continues to serve today as Chairman of the Courthouse Preservation Committee.

**THIRD FLOOR AREAS ARE CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC -**  
Tours may be arranged by calling the Board of Commissioners Office.

## Third Floor

As a result of the mid-1970's remodeling, the courthouse gained 5,200 square feet of usable space, including most of this floor, which houses the offices of the Benton County District Attorney and his staff. For reasons of security and privacy, these offices are open to the public only by prior arrangement. Special group tours are arranged by calling the Board of Commissioners office.

A significant feature of these modern offices is the set of arched windows, shielded by translucent curtains, which provide natural light from the courtroom windows below but keep sound from spilling from one floor to the other.

Centered in the ceiling of the District Attorney's suite is the restored, ornate medallion that once formed the centerpiece of the Courtroom ceiling. It is topped by a skylight that extends through the floor above and on up through the Courthouse roof.





## Upper Floors

Before 1979, the Courthouse's uppermost floors were dusty, bare-raftered spaces devoted to storage and the mechanisms that operate the Town Clock and carillon. Architect Stadsvold used this space to create a quiet, secluded Law Library and a small lunchroom for courthouse employees. These rooms, too, are closed to the public except by appointment.

*Below: The new law library provides a quiet, secluded workspace.*



Judges and members of the Benton County Bar find the Law Library convenient — and important — to the practice of law in Benton County. They do their research at desks and chairs which once were located in the old County Clerk's office downstairs.

A few years after the Law Library opened, Courthouse workers noticed small cracks forming in the plastered walls below. A subsequent study of the room's weight-bearing capacity resulted in the removal of hundreds of volumes and the establishment of a strict, six-ton weight limit on the books and furnishings permitted to be stored there.

One flight up is the brick-walled employee lunchroom, where high on one wall, scrawled on an exposed beam, one can barely make out four handwritten signatures with the words "Corvallis bell-ringers," and the dates Dec. 31, 1891 and Jan. 1, 1892. Although the names are difficult to







decipher, it appears that the men who helped Corvallis ring that old year out and new year in were T.E. Wilson, E.P. Greffoy, Charlie Beach, A. D. Nash and Silas Coney.

A steep wooden staircase ascends to the clock tower. In the tower hangs a massive, cast-bronze bell that rings the hour. That bell was silent for nearly a quarter of a century after County Commissioners bowed to complaints from downtown hotel owners that its tolling was disturbing their patrons' rest. Circuit Judge Richard Mengler, who worked in the courthouse from 1954 until his retirement in 1981, tried for years to have the bell reactivated. Finally, with the help of a county janitor and an electrician, Mengler climbed into the tower and reconnected the mechanism. The bell has rung the hours of the day ever since. (31)

**O**ver the last several decades, in the name of "progress" and "modernization" many of the beautiful and architecturally significant public and private buildings of Oregon have been destroyed or refurbished without regard to the historical significance of these structures. Gone are the courthouses in Lane, Marion, Yamhill, Clackamas and Multnomah Counties that were built prior to 1900. Their destruction marks a great loss. In only a few counties do there remain the grand "Houses of Justice" from this era and among these the Benton County Courthouse stands alone as the "oldest" still being used as a courthouse.

Through foresight and respect for their heritage, the people of Benton County have preserved this architectural treasure, which today serves not only as a functioning Justice Center, but as the unifying symbol of their community.

Salvaging and maintaining this "grand old lady" will be the task of future generations. The degree to which we have engendered in them a respect for this "special place" and "tradition" will determine how well they fulfill that responsibility. We wish them well.



## Footnotes:

---

1. West Shore Magazine, May 1889, Vol. 15, p. 265
2. Benton County Courthouse Study, Cy Stads vold, 1977
3. County Court Journal, Vol. A, as cited in Inventory of the County Archives, p. A-39.
4. Corvallis Gazette, March 30, 1888; Feb. 1, 1889; March 15, 1889.
5. Corvallis Gazette, Jan. 25, 1889.
6. Corvallis Gazette, Sept. 26, 1868; April 8, 1887.
7. Abstract of Votes: 1886
8. County Court Journal, Vol. 4, Feb. 15, 1888.
9. Corvallis Gazette, July 6, 1888
10. Benton County Scrapbook, 1968 (Corvallis Public Library)
11. Corvallis Gazette, July 12, 1889.
12. Benton County Scrapbook.
13. Corvallis Gazette, Oct. 25, 1889.
14. Corvallis Gazette, March 30, 1888.
15. Corvallis Gazette, July 12, 1889.
16. "Flight of Time: A Photographic Essay", Mary Gallagher, 1988
17. Corvallis Gazette, Feb. 22, 1889.
18. Benton County Courthouse Study, Stads vold; conversation with Col. Jim Blodgett, July 19, 1987.
19. History of the Benton County Courthouse, Edwin A. Johnson. Unpublished manuscript, 1984.
20. Benton County Herald, June 27, 1957.
21. County Court Journal, Feb. 15, 1888.
22. Benton County Courthouse Study, Stads vold, ibid.
23. Corvallis Gazette-Times, Feb. 19, 1979.
24. History of the Benton County Courthouse, Johnson, p. 88.
25. History of the Benton County Courthouse, Johnson, p. 23-25; Corvallis Gazette, March 30, 1888; April 6, 1888; Feb. 18, 1889.
26. Conversation with Chris Jeppsen, architect for 1954 remodeling, June 12, 1987.
27. Benton County Courthouse Study, Stads vold, ibid.
28. Corvallis Gazette-Times, May 13, 1976.
29. Letter from Agnes Eckman to Benton County Historical Museum, April 6, 1981.
30. Conversations with Judge Richard Mengler, June 25, 1987.
31. Conversations with Judge Richard Mengler, June 25, 1987.
32. Oregon State Bar Bulletin, Dec. 1986, article by Edwin A. Johnson.